

Quotations showing that

The British Church

Can claim apostolic foundation, unbroken continuity,
and Scriptural authority as the sole basis of its rule
of faith and its form of government as

The Church of England

MICHAEL A CLARK

The British Church

Some glimpses of its Earliest History may be gathered from the words of the following

GREAT AUTHORITIES IN BYGONE CENTURIES

It is essential first to note the following historical context:

The **British** Church has Primacy – **not** the *English* Church.

There was no England as such at this time – simply Britain.

The Bishops were British and **not** Anglo-Saxons.

The three ancient Bishoprics or Archbishoprics were:

London, Caer Effrawg = Viroconium (Wroxeter) and **Caer Leon** or **Llandaff**.

Caer Effrawg means ‘Castle (Fortress) of the **Hebrews**.’

The constant mistake of terming **Effrawg** as Eboricum (York) is a confusion.

Recent excavations have shown a massive military complex near Chester; this again points to Emperors living there and **not** *at that time* at less significant York.

In the **Diocletian Persecution** (AD 303-313) the British Church supplied the following remarkable list of native martyrs:

Amphibalus, Bishop of Llandaff; **Alban** of Verulam; **Aaron** and **Julius**, presbyters of Caerleon; **Socrates**, Archbishop of York; **Stephen**, Archbishop of London; **Argulius**, his successor; **Nicholas**, Bishop of Penrhyn (Glasgow); **Melior**, Bishop of Carlisle, and 889 communicants in different grades of society (Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, Sec. 10, p. 10. *Martyrology of Notker Balbulus*, AD 894. Haddan & Stubbs, Vol. I, p. 32. Also, Sosomen, c. AD 436. *Hist. Eccl.* Vol I, p. 6).

Ireland earned the title ‘**Isle of the Saints**’ during the early centuries AD. At that time ‘swarms of devoted missionaries’ went out from Ireland to every part of Europe, so much so that Dr Johnson states that Ireland was ‘**the school of the West**’ (*The Early British Church*, p. 15, Roberts).

Origen, born at Alexandria in AD 185, wrote in the beginning of the third century: “**The land of Britain** has received the religion of Christ.”

Tertullian, AD 155-222: A great prolific early Christian author, the first after the Apostles, from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He wrote: The extremities of Spain, the various parts of Gaul, **the regions of Britain** which have never been penetrated by Roman arms have received the religion of Christ.” (*Tertullian Def. Fidel*, p. 179).

Hippolytus, AD 170-236, considered to have been one of the most learned Christian historians, identifies the seventy whom Jesus sent in *Luke* 10, and includes Aristobulus listed in *Romans* 16:10 with Joseph and states that he ended up becoming a Pastor in Britain.

Eusebius, AD 260-340. The Church’s first great historian and Christian polemicist, who became the Bishop of Caesarea about the year 314, wrote:

“**The Apostles** passed beyond the ocean to the **Isles called the Britannic Isles.**” (*De Demonstratione Evangelii*, Lib iii).

St. Dorotheus, AD 255-362, Bishop of Tyre. A learned priest said AD 303: “**Aristobulos**, whom Paul; saluted, writing to the Romans (*Romans* 16:10) was **Bishop of Britain.**” (*Synopsis de Apostol*, Synops 23 “Aristobulus”). “**Simon Zelotes** preached Christ through all Mauretania, and Afric the less. At length he was crucified at Brittainia, slain and buried.” (*Synopsis de Apostol*. Synops 9 “Simon Zelotes”).

St. Hilary of Poitiers, AD 300-376, wrote: “Afterwards the Apostles built several tabernacles, and through all the parts of the earth wherever it was possible to go; even in the **Isles of the Ocean** they built several habitations for God” (Tract XIV, *Psalm* 8. Haddan & Stubbs. Vol I. p. 5). The most ancient French bishoprics claimed to have been founded by the companions of St. Joseph of Arimathea (vide Rabanus, p. 90).

Theodoret the Blessed, AD 423-457. An influential author, theologian and Bishop of Cyprus in Syria, writing in AD 435, said: “**Paul**, liberated from his first captivity at Rome, preached the Gospel to **the Britons and others in the West.** Our fishermen and publicans not only persuaded the Romans and their tributaries to acknowledge the Crucified and His laws, but the Britons also and the Cymry” [the Welsh]. (*D. Civ. Gracae Off. Lib. IX*).

St. Athanasius, AD 296/8-373. An outstanding leader of the Early Church in Alexandria, writing AD 353, describes **the Churches of Britain** as adhering to the faith of the Council of Nicaea, AD 325. (vide Ussher. *De Brit. Ecc. Primord. Cap viii*).

St. Chrysostom, AD 347-407. Patriarch of Constantinople writes: “Though thou shouldest go to the ocean to the **British Isles**, there thou shouldest hear all men everywhere discoursing matters out of the Scriptures with another voice, but not another faith, with a different tongue but the same judgment.” (*Chrysostomi Orat. O Theos Xristos*).

Gildas (Albanicus) the Wise, AD c.500-570. The early British historian wrote: “Christ, the True Sun afforded His light, the knowledge of His precepts, **to our island** in the last year, as we know, of Tiberius Caesar.” (*De Excidio Britanniae*, Sec. 8, p. 25). This was in AD 37, just a few years after the Crucifixion!

The British Bishops, Eborius of York, Restitutus of London and Adelfius of Caerleon were present at the Church Council of Arles to AD 314. British Bishops were also present at the Councils of Nicaea, AD 325, Sardica in Illyria, AD 347, and Ariminum in Italy, AD 359. (Mansi, *Concilia*. Vol. II, pp. 476-477. Haddan & Stubbs, Vol. I, p.7).

It was over Five Centuries after the founding of the Early British Church that the first representative of Roman Christianity came to the British Isles. The monk, Augustine (Austin), sent by Pope Gregory, arrived in Kent in the year AD 597. This was subsequent to the destruction of much of Britain by a comet in AD 562 which undermined the Ancient British kingdom of Arthur II in South Wales and England. No previous Bishop of Rome had ever attempted to interfere in the powerful British State before that event.

The ‘Royal’ History of England, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1893, ref. Book 1, The Old English Kingdoms, Chapter 2, Christianity in England, under AD 597, paragraph 8 records:

“Augustine, appointed **Archbishop of Canterbury**, entered with zeal on the duties of his see. His grand object was to bend every man in Britain beneath Roman sway. He held a conference with the simple priests of the **Cymri**; but they resented the arrogance of the foreign monk, who desired to thrust on them the tenets of a distant city and an unknown man, and refused obedience to the Pope. A second meeting had the same result. Repelled by Augustine’s crafty proposals, but undaunted by his violent threats, they broke off the conference, and went back to their mountains (AD 603)” – *in Christian Wales!*

St. Augustine, writing to Pope Gregory about the Early British Church in AD 600 said: “*In the Western confines of Britain, there is a certain royal island of large extent, surrounded by water, abounding in all the beauties of nature and necessities of life. In the first neophytes of catholic law, God beforehand acquainted them, found a church constructed by no human art, but by the hands of Christ himself, for the salvation of His people.*” (Spelman, *Concilia*. p .5).

This refers to **the Tradition** that between the ages of 12 and 30, during which period the Gospels make no mention of Him (compare *Luke 2:42* and 49, with 3:23), Christ Himself visited the South-west of the **British Isles** with **Joseph of Arimathea**, traditionally supposed to be the uncle of the Virgin Mary, and came to Ynis-witrin, later called the Isle of Avalon, now Glastonbury, Somerset, and part of the mainland. Tradition and history has asserted that when Joseph of Arimathea returned to the British Isles after the Resurrection and Ascension, he and the Disciples who came with him built a wattle church which was the first Christian Church above ground in the world. This traditionally is thought to have been at Glastonbury and upon the site of the ruined Norman Chapel of St Mary in the Abbey grounds.

However, archaeological investigations and historical researches in recent decades have focused attention on South Wales as the area where Joseph of Arimathea built the first wattle church on the site of **St Peter's-super-Montem in the Upper Ewenny Area**, founded later by the Apostle Peter (*The Holy Kingdom*, Adrian Gilbert with Alan Wilson and Baram Blackett, pub. 1998, Bantam Press, ISBN 0593 040627).

There is also **St Illtud's Church** and the **Galilee Chapel at Llantwit Major** with its fine ancient stone crosses. This ancient centre of learning, founded about AD 500, a century before Augustine landed in Kent, has a heritage in our national Christian faith which has yet to be revealed. The stone inscribed name in South Wales of 'Illtu,' who can be identified as St Illtutus or Illyd, is now evidenced as **Joseph of Arimathea**, who came to Llantwit Major where he founded a Christian college. His unmarked burial site is also now considered to be in the corner of a ruined church to the rear of Cardiff Castle which dates from AD 79.

Maelgwyn of Llandaff, AD 450. Lord of Anglesey and Snowdonia, and uncle of St David of Wales, who forswore his realm in order to become a monk, has left these words: "Joseph of Arimathea, the noble decurion, entered his perpetual sleep with his XI Companions in the Isle of Avalon." (*Thick Vellum Cottonian M.S.* See also Ussher. *Antiq.*, p.12. Ed. 1687).

Polydore Vergil, a learned Italian historian in England, AD 1470-1555, wrote "**Britain**, partly through Joseph of Arimathea ... was of all kingdoms the first that received the Gospel." (Lib. II).

Superior Dignity and Antiquity was claimed for the National Church in Britain at the Church Councils of Pisa in AD 1409, Constance 1417, Sienna 1424 and Basle 1434, on the grounds that "the Churches of France and Spain must yield in points of antiquity and precedence to that of

Britain as the latter Church was founded by Joseph of Arimathea **immediately after the passion of Christ.**” (*Disputation super Dignitatem Angliae et Galliae in Concilio Constantiano*. Theodore Martin, Lovan, 1517).

Cardinal Baronius, AD 1538-1607, confirmed the primacy of the Early British Church over that of Rome, having been planted in the British Isles in AD 35 (*Ecclesiastical Annals* for AD 35).

**The Continuity and Independence of the
Original British Church may be seen in the following**

SPOTLIGHTS OF HISTORY

The British Bishops replied to St Augustine in these words: “Be it known and declared that we all, individually and collectively, are in all humility prepared to defer to the Church of God, and to the Bishop of Rome, and to every sincere and godly Christian, so far as to love everyone according to his degree, in perfect charity, and to assist them all by word and deed in becoming the children of God. But as for any other obedience, we know of none that he, whom you term the Pope, or Bishop of Bishops, can demand. The deference we have mentioned we are ready to pay to him as to every other Christian, but in all other respects our obedience is due to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Caerleon, who is alone under God our ruler to keep us right in the way of salvation.” (Spelman, *Concila*. pp. 108-109. Haddan & Stubbs, Vol. I, p. 122).

The Venerable Bede (Church of Rome) in AD 740 wrote concerning the **British Church**: “The Britons are contrary to the whole Roman world and

enemies to the Roman customs, not only in their Mass, but in their tonsure.” (*Bede*. Bk. 2, C. 23).

Prior to this the **Synod of Whitby**, AD 664, marked the first entry of Roman influence into the native Church which was now of both British and Celtic origin, when it was agreed that Roman usages on three points were to be followed. **One far reaching result** was that the native Church, distinguished for its evangelistic zeal and piety, but not having acquired centralised control, was to develop this under increasing Roman encroachment.

A few years later, **Theodore of Tarsus**, became Archbishop of Canterbury, AD 667-690. His great achievement lay in organising the country into dioceses and parishes. “He was the first of the Archbishops whom the whole English Church consented to obey” (*Bede*). But while a unified system of Church government was thus established when England was still divided into Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the first quotation of Bede shows that there was no spirit of unity, but definite antagonism, between the British and Roman strains of Christianity.

The First Notable Resistance to Roman usurpation was made by William the Conqueror, AD 1066-1087. Upon Pope Gregory VII demanding of him homage for his realm of England, he replied: “Fealty I have never willed to do, nor will I do it now. I have never promised it, nor do I find that my predecessors did it to yours.” (*A Short History of the English People*, 1874, J R Green, Vol. I, The Norman Conquest 1068-1071, Part 3).

Later, he refused to allow Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, to go to Rome at the summons of the Pope to answer for his conduct. (*The History of the Norman Conquest*, E A Freeman, 1867-1876, Vol. IV, pp. 434-435).

King Edward III in refusing to give homage and to pay the tribute to the See of Rome guaranteed by King John for himself and his heirs, asked Parliament for their advice. The Bishops, Lords, and Commons, after full deliberation gave it in these words: “That neither King John nor any other king could bring himself, his realm and people under such subjection without their assent ... that if done, it was without the consent of Parliament and contrary to his coronation oath, and that in case the Pope should attempt to constrain the King and his Subjects to perform what he lays claim to, they would resist and withstand him to the uttermost of their power.” (*Hansard, Parliamentary Records*, Vol. I, p. 129).

The Continuity of our Church is seen in **Archbishop Cranmer’s** statement to Parliament in 1549 that the Prayer Book, then being authorised, contained the same prayers that had been in use in Britain for over 1,500 years – that is from the days of Joseph of Arimathea and the Apostles. (*The British Reformers*. Vol. VIII, p.271. Also, *Proceedings in the House of Lords*, British Museum).

The Independence of our Established Church was asserted and protected by the following Measures and Statute Law, designed to limit external influence, and in which the British Church was designated ‘**The Holy Church of England**’:

Consuetudines of William I	2 nd Statute of Provisors 1363
Constitutions of Clarendon 1164	3 rd Statute of Provisors 1389
Statute of Mortmain 1279	Act of Annates 1532
Statute of Carlisle 1307	Act of Supremacy 1534
Statute of Praemunire 1353	Act of Uniformity 1559
1 st Statute of Provisors 1357	Act of Settlement 1701

This breach with a foreign system was made absolute in the words of Article 37, to which Articles all Clergy of the Church of England are still required to subscribe. “**The Queen’s Majesty** hath the chief power in this Realm of England, and other her Dominions, unto whom the chief Government of all Estates of this Realm, **whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil** in all causes doth appertain, and is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign jurisdiction ... The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England.”

The Sovereign, by virtue of her position as Supreme Governor of our Established Church, undertakes in the **Coronation Oath** “to the utmost of her power to maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel; to the utmost of her power to maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by Law. And to maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government thereof, as by Law established in England.”

Furthermore, in accordance to the headship of a Pope, the appointment of the Sovereign to the headship of the Church of England marks **an exact following of scriptural precedent** as the above Article shows. “We give not to our Princes the ministering either of God’s Word, or of the Sacraments ... but that only prerogative, which we see to have been given always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God himself; that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charges by God, **whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal**, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn evil-doers,”

Our Island Home can claim that, from the days when the first wattle church was built in the “**Western confines of Britain**,” it has never lacked a Church, subject to no other Church on earth, recognising the

apostolic Scriptures alone for its rule of faith, and its form of government, and which has not only received its faith direct from the Apostles, but has reason to believe that the **Redeemer of the Lost Sheep of Israel and Saviour of the World** visited the very place of its foundation.

This booklet is based on an original set of quotations arranged by the late Revd. G H Nicholson.

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National Faith Conservation



The British-Israel-World Federation
121 Low Etherley, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham DL14 0HA, England
Tel: 01388 834395 Email: admin@britishisrael.co.uk